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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000045

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)
SUBJECT: FIJI VISA SANCTIONS: ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS; EFFECTS
ALREADY VISIBLE

REF: SUVA 43 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

1. (C) We propose including President Iloilo in USG visa sanctions against the interim government, since he has become a front man "approving" any and all decrees placed before him, even though the Fiji Constitution does not grant him such powers. We provide a few additional snippets of evidence regarding human rights abuses. We note that the invocation of visa sanctions by Australia and New Zealand is already biting. A heated attack by Bainimarama on the Kiwi policy brought a firm response. Prominent opponents of the coup are urging the international community to maintain pressure, including visa sanctions, in the effort to force a return to democratic governance ASAP. End summary.

Visa sanction on President Iloilo?

2. (C) The Fiji visa-sanction lists we have seen from Washington do not, as yet, include President Iloilo. While it is true that he has not taken on a new job officially in the post-coup era and in fact was deposed by Commodore Bainimarama for the first month of the coup, it is also true that Iloilo accepted back the presidency from Bainimarama on Jan. 4 and announced his full support for the coup at that time. Subsequently he has allowed a series of decrees to be issued under his name that have removed officials, appointed other officials (including Commodore Bainimarama as interim Prime Minister), formalized a state of emergency, and, most recently, provided immunity from prosecution for all acts by the military, police, and others related to the coup. From our reading of the Fiji Constitution, the President has no lawful power to assume such expansive roles.

3. (C) From Embassy Suva's perspective, Iloilo has clearly become a facade for Commodore Bainimarama's continuation of military control as interim PM. Thus, Iloilo merits inclusion in USG visa sanctions. We note that Australia has included him on its visa-ban list based on his statements in support of the coup and his involvement in the swearing in of an illegal government.

Other visa-sanction cases

4. (C) We have seen a draft document put together under supervision of Fiji Human Rights Commissioner Shamima Ali that has 58 pages of "alleged human rights abuses, constitutional violations and breaches of the rule of law"

related to the Fiji coup. Most of the listings are familiar and have been included in Embassy reporting. We noted a few new pieces of evidence that may be of use as Washington considers the USG visa-sanction list.

-- Reportedly Angie Heffernan of the Pacific Centre for Public Integrity (PCPI) was visited by two military lawyers on Dec. 4, 2006. Amani Bale and Ana Rokomokoti reportedly warned Ms. Heffernan to stop opposition to the military. The RFMF lawyers specifically referred to paid advertisements by PCPI, Transparency International, and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement.

-- Reportedly when Public Services Commission Chairman Stuart Huggett was taken to the RFMF HQ on Dec. 7, 2006, Commodore Bainimarama kicked Huggett's legs out from under him and beat him around the head, telling him, "Don't f*** with the military." Earlier reports had said Bainimarama had pulled on Huggett's ear.

-- Reportedly on the evening of Dec. 23, 2006, seven ethnic-Fijian taxi drivers who had been engaging in a pre-Christmas drinking party were taken by RFMF soldiers to a forested area, stripped naked, and then forced to handle each other sexually. Reportedly the officer in charge at the scene was Lt. Siwatibau Rabuka.

Visa sanctions capture interim government attention

15. (C/NF) The invocation of visa sanctions imposed by Australia and New Zealand has caught the interim government's attention. When the New Zealand High Commission refused a visa to interim CEO in the PM's Office, Parmesh Chand, last

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week, Bainimarama publicly threatened to punish New Zealand. (Note: we hear that privately Bainimarama threatened a New Zealand diplomat with harm.) The New Zealand PM and Foreign Minister have since reiterated that the GNZ intends to stay the course on sanctions. A clearly worried Government CEO approached the Ambassador at a private function last weekend to ask if the USG is imposing sanctions on senior civil servants. The Ambassador noted that the U.S. publicly announced its visa sanctions will apply to interim government leaders. Details will follow. When deposed PM Qarase phoned the Ambassador today, Jan. 22, he specifically thanked the USG for imposing visa sanctions, noted their value, and said he would urge the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) to impose such sanctions to inhibit interim-government travel in the Pacific.

Comment

16. (C) A prominent figure who opposes Bainimarama's coup has informed us that responses to the coup have not concluded yet (see septel). Deposed PM Qarase and others have stressed to us that sanctions by foreign governments, including the United States, are an extremely important element to pressure Bainimarama and his interim government to return Fiji to rule of law and democracy ASAP. We recommend that, as Washington considers the visa-sanction list, senior civil servants who have clearly chosen to assist the military's interim government be included. With the announcement on Jan. 19 that all government CEOs' contracts were terminated, any who wish to continue under the interim government apparently will have to apply for permanent-secretary jobs. Those who apply will thereby attest support for the interim government and in our view will merit inclusion on the visa-sanction list. Such inclusion would parallel their inclusion on the Australian and New Zealand lists.
DINGER